

## TAJIKISTAN RUSSIA RELATIONS IN EMERGING WORLD ORDER

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### Abstract

*The relation between Tajikistan and Russia has remained strong even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Both countries share a common perspective on various issues, such as, threat of religious fundamentalism, national separatism and cross-border terrorism which constitute the main threat to regional security, stability and development. So far as inter ethnic relation is concerned Tajikistan's adoption of the Language Law in 1989 has slightly affected, Tajik-Russian relations. But the Tajik Government undertook some confidence building measures which included the protection of Russian speaking people's interests by changing the language law and by granting dual citizenship to the Russian people. In the sphere of economy, though Tajik-Russian relation were badly disturbed because of the commercial and financial arrangements in Russia after the demise of the Soviet Union, still the inter regional economic links between the two countries remain. Both sides signed inter-state inter-governmental and inter-departmental documents regulating trade and economic cooperation between Tajikistan and Russia. So far as the strategic and security factor is concerned, Tajikistan totally depends upon Russia for maintaining peace and security in the region. Tajik Russia relationship is no longer based on ideological grounds, rather it is more practical and mutually beneficial in nature.*



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The breakup of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of five independent states in Central Asia namely, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, covering a vast area of over 4 millions square kilometers or almost one sixth of the territory of former Soviet Union. But the region possessed a collective population of only about 55 million people. After their independence, the five Central Asian states suddenly emerged in to sovereign existence on the dismantling multi nationality federation of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Emergence of Central Asia as the latest region of sovereign states on the global map opened prospects of distinct shift in power politics.<sup>1</sup> Central Asia under the soviets were organized into five republics and continued in the same form as successor states after Soviet disintegration.<sup>2</sup>

The present state of Tajikistan was created during the soviet rule in 1929 which brought economic and social benefits to Tajikistan. Though Tajikistan got full national territorial status during the Soviet period, Tajik identity had formed in the fifth and sixth

centuries, according to soviet historians, and the process was completed within the tenth century Samanid empire.<sup>3</sup> From its inception to the present century, Tajikistan experienced different rulers who ruled different periods and was influenced by the culture and administration of different rulers.

The Republic of Tajikistan since independence in 1991 is living through a period of national and state reconstruction, self determination and political and economic integration into the world community.<sup>4</sup> The birth of this independent state was followed by a widespread bloody conflict one of the longest and most difficult on the territory of the former Soviet Union. It has become a constant feature in the life of the country and the Central Asian region as a whole and has greatly influenced the process of state formation in Tajikistan, the course and direction of transformation processes in its economy, its social and cultural life, and its foreign policy, including relations with the Russian federation.<sup>5</sup> The conflict has slowed down the achievement of full statehood in Tajikistan. As a result, oilmov points out, till the late 1990, the national security concept has could not be fully determined, national interests were not identified, foreign policy priorities were not set, and the mechanism for the establishment and implementation of foreign policy was not been worked out.<sup>6</sup>

Relations between Russia and Tajikistan are very complex. This is the characteristic for all the post soviet countries which are now mere fragments of the huge former USSR. For 70 years, Russia and Tajikistan were tied together, first, as parts of a single political, economic and social system and second, as 'center' and 'periphery'.<sup>7</sup> In some respects, their ties are not only pure inter-state relations, but a considerable part of their relations now takes place at the **level of the CIS**.<sup>8</sup>

Tajikistan's relations with Russia can be analyzed from the historical point of view. Tajikistan - Russia relations after the USSR certainly owe a lot to their historical attachments in various phases. The relationship between the two sides has always been a smooth one since the time of Tajikistan's creation as a republic within the Soviet Union. These relations have passed through various stages of development starting from the Tsarist colonial times to the present. Tajikistan's geo political importance has induced both the sides to chart out their policies and relationship carefully and very smoothly. Tajikistan is a country with huge natural resources. The region has considerable mineral deposits including gold, antimony, silver, aluminum, iron, lead, mercury and tin. There are large reserves of coal also. Thus, Tajikistan has great strategic importance for Russia.

Though the disintegration of the Soviet Union brought about drastic changes in the post second world war balance of power affecting the interests of both the countries, still, there is a continuity in Tajik-Russian relations even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The relations between the two countries have remained cordial and strong despite the changed international scenario. Both of them share a common perspective on numerous issues, such as, threat of Islamic fundamentalism, national extremism trans-border terrorism and on the issue of global terrorism.

### **Tajikistan's Language Policy and its Impact on Tajik-Russian Relations**

Tajikistan's relations with Russia was disturbed in 1989, especially since the adoption of 1989 law, making 'Tajik' the primary state language. The Russian concerns of possible educational and employment discrimination were further intensified during the Dushanbe riots of February 1990. Though the Russians were not singled out for attack, there were incidents of assault and intimidation aimed at them.<sup>9</sup>

Many Russians blamed the decision to make 'Tajik' the state language and denial of same status to Russians and Uzbeks who constituted 10 percent and 23 percent respectively of the republic's population at that time.<sup>10</sup> Although there have been no serious outbreak of violence against the Russians in Tajikistan the resurgence of ethno-nationalism has generated fear and panic among them. As a result, there have been large-scale Russian emigration out of Tajikistan.

The Russian speaking population tends to be concentrated in the administrative and industrial occupational sectors. They are often depicted as industrial workers, health care professionals, teachers in higher educational institutions and administrators. The exodus of Russians on a large scale has aroused concern among Tajikistan's elite who became worried about the republic losing brains and skills. The present Government in Tajikistan is eager to ensure the protection of the Russians both for economic and national security reasons. The Tajik leadership assumed obligations to provide social and legal guarantees to the Russian population in its territory.<sup>11</sup>

The Tajik Government officials like the then Prime Minister Abdulladzhonov, emphasized the continued importance of Russia's role in ensuring stability in the region and Tajik Government proposed to the supreme Soviet that Russian be accorded equal status with Tajik as a state language and that Russian residents be permitted dual citizenship.<sup>12</sup> Though the Government of Tajikistan promises to give all types of rights to its Russian minorities and

claims to be following secular and democratic policies, but till today, the constitution of Tajikistan is silent on guaranteeing equal status for the Russian and other European minorities. Islam still acts as a cementing factor which the Tajik think is the very manifestation of their ethnic identity.

Despite the Islamic fundamentalism in Tajikistan and Russian emigration from Tajikistan, there are still about 80 thousand Russians staying in the Republic, tolerating all the political, social and economic difficulties. It is mainly because of their economic Concern that most of them have not preferred to migrate. What prevents exodus on a large scale at the moment is the equally worsening situation in Russia, where unemployment, poverty and higher cost of living has discouraged Russian minorities outside to look to their own state as a better alternative.<sup>13</sup>

### **Tajikistan - Russia Economic Engagement**

In the sphere of economy, the Republic of Tajikistan has historically strong economic ties with Russia. The history of economic relations between the two countries is as old as Tajikistan long association with the Tsarist empire and latter with the Soviet Union. Both are strongly and inseparably associated with each other by numerous economic ties even after the disintegration of the USSR. The region's importance has been greatly highlighted for its huge reserves of natural resources. Tajikistan geo-strategic importance has attracted Russia to establish close and cordial economic relations with the region. Tajikistan has always been a priority in Russian foreign and economic policy. Russia regards economic cooperation with Tajikistan as the best way to counter the influence of the United States and other outside powers in the region. The economic factors play a dominant role in the relationships of both the countries. Trade and economic ties between Tajikistan and Russia are based on inter-Governmental agreements on trade and economic cooperation as well as on commercial contracts.

Following the collapse of the USSR in late 1991, loss of trade links with Russia, non-availability of enormous budget allocation from the union budget, end of the practice of free use of the transport infrastructure of the union, full economic blockade by the neighbour country etc., brought Tajikistan to deep economic crisis.<sup>14</sup> The country was adversely affected by the widespread disruptions in the former soviet trading system, resulting in shortfalls of urgently needed raw materials and other supplies essential to the economy.<sup>15</sup> As power of the central authorities collapsed, so did structure of inter republic trade, shortage of

food, consumer goods and fuel spread. The effects of fuel and raw material shortages, transport and distribution breakdowns were felt in the form of strikes and ethnic disturbances.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike other former Soviet Republics, the Tajik Government was slow to implement reforms designed to effect a transition to a market economy system. Economic relations between Tajikistan and Russia was further hampered by the civil war which broke out in 1992 and the outmigration of Russians who constituted the skilled labour in Tajik Industry. Despite these problems, the inter-regional economic links between the two countries still remain. The internal turmoil and civil war in Tajikistan attracted the role of Russia in the region and the evolving economic and security doctrine of Russia largely determined the destiny of Tajikistan. Not only in Tajikistan, but in all other Central Asian Republics. Russia continued to be the first foreign policy option due to their economic and security need. As a raw material producing area in Central Asia, Tajikistan is an important source for Russian market. Russia has been the largest export and import partner of Tajikistan though this decreased towards the later part of the 1990s. Further, integration with Russia has taken place with the signing of the Customs Union Treaty (CUT) and Tajikistan joining the recently formed Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). So, maintaining a healthy economic relation with Russia is very important for Tajikistan in order to have a successful political and economic transformation. On the one hand, given all the political and economic compulsions, Tajikistan's inclination towards Russia is very strong. On the other hand, Tajikistan is of great economic significance to Russia as it has huge mineral deposits and is producer of commodities and goods of vital interest to Russia. All these factors help to strengthen the economic relations between Russia and Tajikistan.

### **Tajikistan-Russia Military Relations**

The most extensive ties between Tajikistan and Russia are in the military and security spheres. The military relations between the two countries have remained strong even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In matters of security, Tajikistan totally depends upon Russia and regards the latter as the guarantor of stability in the region. Tajikistan's too has great strategic importance for Russia because of its large reserves of natural resources. Russia not only remains the most important neighbour of Tajikistan, but also the guarantor of regional stability and wants to maintain political stability in order to check the interference of extra-regional powers. Concerning Tajikistan security ties with Russia in the light of the

strategic geo-politics and security scenario of Central Asia, it can be said beyond doubt that Tajikistan's almost depends entirely upon Russia owing partly to the difficulty in forming a credible army after the disintegration of the USSR. Tajikistan has set up its own armed forces with the assistance of Russia and has signed a number of agreements with the latter for ensuring its national security both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Russian policy in Tajikistan has been determined not by ideological concerns for democracy, but by its security and strategic concerns. The primary Russian concern has been to ensure the security of Tajikistan and to safeguard its territorial integrity. The strategic alliance of Russian democracy with the communist elite of Tajikistan is rooted in the desire to retain its sphere of influence at the expense of ideology.<sup>17</sup> Russia has made it clear that Tajikistan is an inseparable link in its defence strategy. The 'Tajik-Afghan border is often referred to as our border' by the Russian Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs. In an interview in July 1993, the then Russian Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev took that line as far as implying that Tajikistan was a part of a larger Russian security sphere that goes beyond its natural borders.<sup>18</sup>

The most visible involvement of Russia in the Central Asian region is the presence of its troops on the Tajik-Afghan border. Again, Moscow perceives security threats emanating from Tajikistan are due to many reasons. The former Soviet Union was directly involved in Afghanistan which had far reaching implications for Russia and Tajikistan (bordering with Afghanistan). Moscow fears that an unstable Tajikistan can destabilize and disrupt the neighbouring countries of Central Asia. Moscow sees Tajikistan as the key point of the re-emerging balance of power in Central Asia and controlling Tajikistan's means outside powers such as, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia could be prevented from exerting their influence in the region.<sup>19</sup>

Russian interest in Tajikistan is further strengthened by the presence of large numbers of Russians and Russian - speaking people in the region. Despite of assurances of help and protection to the Russians by the Tajik Government, the Russian population faces harassment, social discomfiture and discriminations.<sup>20</sup> As regards the Russians and Russian - speaking populations, the Russian and Russian interest is to work for a peaceful settlement of ethnic issues serious and large scale ethnic conflicts breaking out in Central Asia could have disastrous consequences for Russia.<sup>21</sup>

Another manifestation of Russian's security concern is the perceived fear in Russia of the spread of divisive forces especially of Islamic fundamentalism, gaining a foothold in Central Asia, including Tajikistan. The southward orientation of the central Asian states is a matter of concern to Russia. If Islamic fundamentalism or other forms of extremism spreads to the region, it is certain to have a spillover effect on Russia.<sup>22</sup>

Tajikistan's relations with Russia are so close and intimate that though the former provided air bases to United States after September 11, it is believed to have consulted Russia on offering bases. Both the countries reiterated their determination to jointly fight national separatism, international terrorism and religious extremism which constitute the main threat to regional security, stability and development.

During the anti-Taliban campaign between 1998-2001, Russian-Tajik alliance was further cemented. Both were instrumental in the formation and strengthening of the Northern Alliance led by Ahmed Shah Masood, a Tajik. After the defeat of Taliban, Northern Alliance has been the major component of the present Afghan administration. While addressing the Tajik parliament on 22 April 2002, President Imomali Rakhmonov characterized relations with Russia as "an important factor of regional security". He also declared that Tajikistan assigned priority to cooperation with Russia in foreign policy. The Tajik President said Tajikistan regards its partnership with Russia as essential for its domestic stability and developments in the entire Central Asia.<sup>23</sup> While visiting the 201<sup>st</sup> MRD located in Tajikistan, on April 26, 2003, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that "the Russian military presence in Tajikistan is an important and quite positive factor of regional security provision. We plan to further strengthen our presence here and the president of Tajikistan supports these plans."<sup>24</sup>

Thus, various efforts have continued for strengthening further Tajikistan's military ties with Russia on a bilateral or multilateral basis in recent years.

In Conclusion, it may be said that Tajik – Russia relations from Soviet times till the present have remained close and cordial. The widespread good will that Russia enjoys due to a variety of reasons has helped Tajikistan to take concrete and bold steps to strengthen its relations with Russia and Russia's basic thrust towards the region has been one of the positive engagement.

**KEY Words:** Erstwhile – former, •Dismantling – breakup, •Trans-border – Crossing or extending across a border between two countries, • Intimidation – the action of intimidating someone, •Ethno-nationalism – it is a form of nationalism where the nation is defined in terms of ethnicity. • Exodus – a mass departure of people, • CUT – Customs Union Treaty,

- EEU – Eurasian Economic Union, • Ethnicity – the fact or state of belonging to a social group, • Strategic Partnership – a relationship between two countries to form a joint venture.
- Discomfiture – a feeling of embarrassment, • Divisive force – who divides the nation, • Spill Over – of a bad situation or strong emotion.

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